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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA'S NEW POLICE COMMISSIONER HITS THE
GROUND RUNNING

¶1. (U) Summary: President Zuma recently appointed Bhekokwakhe Hamilton Cele as South Africa National Police Commissioner (SAPS). Cele replaces former Jackie Selebi, who was placed on administrative leave in January 2008 following allegations of corruption. In the interim, the SAPS suffered from lack of leadership and by association remained under a cloud of suspicion. Selebi's contract finally expired at the end of June 2009. With the appointment of Cele as Commissioner, the SAPS has an opportunity to put the Selebi era behind it and move forward. Post offers below background on South Africa's new top cop. Cele's very active first weeks in office offer promising signs that the former teacher and longtime ANC insider is serious about tackling crime. End summary.

BACKGROUND ON THE NEW POLICE BOSS

¶2. (U) Bheki Cele was born on April 22, 1952 in uMzumbe near Port Shepstone, KwaZulu Natal (KZN). Cele's mother died when he was nine months old, and his father died when he was in high school. He was raised by relatives and was a disciplined student. In a local interview, Cele said, "I remember when I was doing matric, I only had one shirt but it was the cleanest in the class. The teachers asked me if I had a new shirt for everyday, and were amazed when I told them that I only had one shirt and washed it every evening."

¶3. (U) As a young teacher at Mbumbulu south of Durban, Cele joined the ANC underground and was instrumental in founding the National Education Union of South Africa, now known as the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). In the early 1980's, Cele joined the United Democratic Movement (UDF), and founded youth organizations aligned to the African National Congress. In 1984, state police attempted to arrest Cele for his political activities, but he managed to escape and fled to Angola, where he met Jacob Zuma and joined the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto weSizwe. In 1987, Cele was smuggled back into South Africa but was soon captured by state police and imprisoned on Robben Island until 1990. Upon his release, Cele continued his involvement with the ANC and was tapped to co-ordinate the organization's security and peace initiatives. In 1994, he was elected to the KZN Provincial Executive Committee and became a member of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature. He also served as the chairperson of the Safety and Security Portfolio Committee and the chaired the chairpersons of the KZN Legislature. In 2001, Cele was appointed the chairperson of the biggest ANC region in KZN, eThekweni (Durban Municipality). He is credited for getting the eThekweni region to back Zuma prior to the 2007 ANC Polokwane conference.

¶4. (U) In 2004, Cele was appointed KZNMEC (member of Executive Council a provincial "Minister") for Transport,

Community Safety and Liaison. Under newly elected KZN Premier Zweli Mkhize, Cele retained his cabinet position as MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison. He is a member of the KZN Provincial Legislature and a member of the KZN Executive Council. Cele is also a member of the National Executive Committee (NEC)

15. (U) In 2004, he launched Catching Crime on the Highway, an initiative to unite the crime fighting efforts of the road traffic inspectorate and the KZN South African Police Services (SAPS). Cele is a flamboyant person and is known for QServices (SAPS). Cele is a flamboyant person and is known for his brightly colored, matching Stetson hats and scarves.

LEADERSHIP STYLE

16. (SBU) Cele is a champion of rural development and as MEC developed Operation kuShunguthuli, which brought road infrastructure development to previously neglected rural communities. Cele also took a strong stance against mini bus related crime and reckless driving. Cele is a popular political figure and consistently ranks as one of KZN's top five ANC leaders. As MEC, Cele developed the reputation as a no-nonsense crime fighter and has often exhorted local police not to die with their guns in their holsters. He has often intervened in mini-bus industry clashes and has shut down mini-bus depots when violence could not be controlled. He has drawn disapproval from members of the public for defending the reckless driving of ministerial security convoys. Interestingly, he has shunned VIP protection for himself.

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PROPOSED CRIME MEASURES SPARK DEBATE

17. (SBU) Barely one week in office, Cele called for a law change to make sure police can shoot at dangerous criminals instead of being "handcuffed." Cele plans to ask Parliament to amend the Legal Code, Section 49 (guidelines for police officers to use deadly force) when it reconvenes this month. He said he would also ask for an amendment of Section 26 (Search and seizure without a warrant), to give police greater powers to intervene in domestic violence. He told Parliaments portfolio committee, the post-apartheid version of Section 49 forced police to think twice before shooting. Cele said the high number of police fatalities proved that when faced with hardened criminals, they could not afford to hesitate. It was up to Members of Parliament to "take collective responsibility" to ensure the law was fair and did not afford criminals "greater rights" than their victims. He said Section 26 of the act must change to remove the onus on police to ask permission before entering premises where domestic abuse is under way. "We have a man (beating) his wife and (police have to say) "please can I come in."

18. (U) Cele said he has committed his services to ensuring the murder and rape is not the norm. The commissioner just recently wrapped up a tour of all nine provincial police stations in South Africa. Cele met with all divisional commissioner and management officers to discuss crime fighting initiatives. He said Senior Commissioners will spend time in problematic policing areas so they can have first hand experience of how to deal with such issues. He has also tasked his commissioners with ensuring coming up with strategies of cracking down on shopping center robberies.

19. (SBU) Bheki Cele commented that he wants to create a country "where people aren't told they're safe, but actually feel safe", and that he is on a mission to change the image of the police and boost their morale. As history has shown, high levels of morale are a precondition for peak

performance that is required for ensuring the safety of visitors and locals alike, especially at times of hosting a major international event like the FIFA 2010. The outspoken Cele said his mandate is to ensure that all South Africans are safe where ever they are. He remarked that the country should strive to reach a point where rape and murder is viewed as abnormal. He said that he would like one day for a young girl to be able to walk alone from a nightclub or else where without any fear of attack, abuse or rape. The controversial Cele, known as something of a Durban fashion trend setter, has proudly donned a police officer's uniform and is making an impressive debut as South Africa's new top cop.

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